

Colin Sparrow

Executive social work leader | Board Director | Governance, workforce development and service improvement

South Australia |

Professional profile

Senior social work leader with substantial experience across public health, child protection, human services governance, policy, workforce development and service improvement. Current Principal Lead Social Work at the Women's and Children's Health Network, providing professional leadership across social work practice, capability, governance and organisational development in a large public health setting.

Experienced Board Director and committee leader with a strong grounding in member-led professional association governance. Current National Director of the Australian Association of Social Workers and Co-Chair of the Board People and Culture Committee. Former President of the AASW South Australian Branch Management Committee and former member of the AASW South Australian Branch Ethics Committee.

Recognised for bringing structure to complex and ambiguous work, translating practice evidence into workable systems, and building governance and professional development approaches that are clear, accountable and capable of implementation.

Capability snapshot

Governance and Board contribution Board and committee leadership, Director duties, ethical governance, conflicts, accountability and decision discipline.	Professional leadership and workforce capability Social work workforce development, professional standards, capability frameworks, supervision, reflective practice and practice quality.
Policy, systems and service improvement Policy development, practice guidance, operating models, quality improvement, adverse event review and implementation planning.	Health, child protection and human services Senior practice and management experience across hospital social work, child protection, family preservation, out-of-home care, court liaison and residential services.
Stakeholder engagement and consultation Branch leadership, member engagement, cross-system collaboration, executive advice and communication across diverse professional and organisational settings.	Safeguarding and ethical practice Child protection, family violence practice, professional ethics, procedural fairness, risk analysis and safe practice systems.
Organisational change and culture Workforce reform, change readiness, leadership development, psychological safety and conditions for effective practice.	Evidence-informed practice Interpreting practice evidence, drawing findings from complex material and applying established knowledge to new organisational contexts.

Current roles

Principal Lead Social Work | Women's and Children's Health Network

December 2025 – present

Provides network-level professional leadership for social work practice, workforce development, governance, policy and service improvement across a large public health service.

Leads and contributes to professional capability development, organisational improvement, stakeholder engagement and executive advice, with a focus on strengthening social work practice and systems.

Contributes to governance and assurance processes, including professional practice, quality, safety and service improvement interfaces.

National Director | Australian Association of Social Workers

May 2026 – present

Contributes to the national governance of the professional representative body for social workers in Australia.

Co-Chair of the Board People and Culture Committee, supporting governance attention to appointments, capability, culture, performance and people-related matters within the Board's remit.

Brings a member-led perspective to Board deliberations, with a focus on professional standards, accountability, organisational repair, member trust and the public value of social work.

Professional experience

Senior Manager, Acute Social Work Services | Central Adelaide Local Health Network

2024 – December 2025

Senior leadership role across acute hospital social work services, including the Royal Adelaide Hospital and The Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

Contributed to operational, workforce and professional practice leadership in a large tertiary health context, with attention to service quality, risk, patient flow, staff support and system interfaces.

Manager Social Work Services | Women's and Children's Hospital

2021 – 2024

Managed hospital social work services in a specialist women's and children's health setting.

Provided professional and operational leadership across social work service delivery, workforce issues, practice quality, stakeholder engagement and health system interfaces.

Department for Child Protection and predecessor agencies | South Australia

1999 – 2021

Held progressively senior practice, supervisory, policy, review and management roles across metropolitan, regional and statewide child protection services.

Roles included social worker, senior practitioner, supervisor, adverse events reviewer, senior programme and policy officer, acting manager, programme manager out-of-home care, principal social worker and acting assistant director.

Developed broad expertise in statutory child protection, family preservation, guardianship, reunification, out-of-home care, court liaison, adverse event review, practice development, policy and service improvement.

Social services roles | United Kingdom

1993 – 1998

Worked in child protection, residential services, placement support and team leadership roles with Avon County Council, North Somerset Council and Gloucestershire Council.

Built early career foundations in statutory practice, residential care leadership, complex family work, safeguarding and multidisciplinary service systems.

Governance and professional contribution

Australian Association of Social Workers – National Director

2026 – present

Board Director contributing to national professional association governance, strategy, accountability and member-focused reform.

AASW Board People and Culture Committee – Co-Chair

2026 – present

Committee leadership supporting Board oversight of people, culture, appointments, capability, performance and related governance matters.

AASW South Australian Branch Management Committee – President

2022 – 2024

Led Branch-level professional association governance, member engagement and contribution to state and national professional issues.

AASW South Australian Branch Ethics Committee – Member

2000 – 2006

Contributed to professional ethics consideration and member-related ethical governance processes.

Catholic Child Protection Council, Adelaide and Port Pirie Diocese – Independent Member and adviser

2010 – 2013

Independent child protection and safeguarding governance contribution, including advice to Archbishop Wilson.

Selected areas of practice and leadership depth

Colin's work spans professional leadership, workforce development, governance, policy, service improvement, stakeholder engagement, organisational change and executive advice. Across health and child protection settings, he has worked with complex practice systems where quality, risk, ethics, culture and operational feasibility need to be considered together.

His practice background includes statutory child protection, family preservation, guardianship, reunification, out-of-home care, adverse event review, hospital social work, acute health services, domestic and family violence-informed practice, safeguarding and professional standards.

Education and professional credentials

Postgraduate Certificate in Management (Public Sector)

Queensland University of Technology, 2014 – 2015

Bachelor of Science with Honours in Sociology and Social Work; Certificate of Qualification in Social Work

University of Bath, 1988 – 1993

Additional committee and assurance contribution

Deputy Chair and Allied Health member, Mortality Review Committee, Women's and Children's Health Network, 2026.

Contributor to cross-organisational professional governance, workforce capability and service improvement work across public health and professional association settings.